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ABSTRACT

Because school materials tend to be highly oriented towards metropolitan life, rural schools must take the initiative to provide materials and curriculum guidelines that help students appreciate the rural experience. Rural teachers should be encouraged to incorporate into their relationship with children an understanding of the lives led by those children. Students training in the education field should be given the opportunity, before reaching the classroom, to gain knowledge of rural life and culture. This paper focuses on the need for multicultural education in rural schools and outlines a semester-long, pre-student teaching project to meet those needs. (CM)

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"Multicultural Education --

A Rural Perspective"

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the needs of rural children and prospective teachers for multicultural education. To meet the justifications listed for multicultural education in a rural setting, a pre-student teaching project is outlined in this article.

If only I didn't feel embarrassed or ashamed to admit my dad was 'just a farmer.' Now I say it with pride. Why, how did my feelings change?

I grew up in a typical farming community. There were 33 students in my senior class in 1968 (and that was a large class). Most of us accepted our rural life, knew little of urban life; yet we ventured that most of us would leave the community and migrate to somewhat of a more structured urban territory. I did.

My first year of college in Boston brought many new changes and adventures. I didn't always understand what I was gaining -- and losing. I felt I had lived a very dull life -- not so much because I did or because I was ashamed of my background, but because I didn't realize the treasures my rural upbringing held. Afterall, as one roommate at college put it "Your dad's <u>just</u> a farmer." (Her dad was <u>just</u> an insurance salesman). What I faced -- and what I spent years discovering is that rural cultures hold a wealth of experiences that should be appreciated and shared -- as do all cultures. I had not yet learned to respect my heritage and was ignorant of other cultures diversities. I was an example of one who needed multicultural education to improve my own self-image of my heritage and to become more knowledgeable of the different cultures I would come to share my life with.

There is a lack of multi-cultural educational understanding and experiences in rural areas by many professional educators and the children they have come to serve. This fact is reinforced by statements such as the following:

> Before I saw the movie, I thought (Indian) reservations were beautiful. --elementary-age, white, rural child.
>
> I learned that Indians live on the waste land that white man didn't want. --elementary-age, white, rural child.
>
> How do Jews celebrate Christmas? --white elementary school.
>
> We have only a white population. Perhaps there is a black family or two. --white teacher, rural area.

Why is this article focusing on multicultural education for rural children?

First, rural children come from many different ethnic backgrounds. They do not speak different languages, but they speak <u>all</u> languages. Their skin is not black, white, red <u>or</u> yellow. Their skin is black, white red <u>and</u> yellow. Rural children are all colors, nationalities, religions -- they are all backrounds joined in one rural culture.

> We had a black family in our community. I don't ever remember anyone treating them differently. They didn't have to sit in the back of the bus -- and they joined in all the same activities as the rest of the school community. We could see they were a different color, but we couldn't understand or associate with the racial turmoil of the 60's. No one ever bothered to explain this to us.

Second, rural children may not live their entire life in rural areas.

Most will be forced to migrate to urban areas by the lure of economic advancement, and will be confronted with diverse populations, challenges, situations -- an entirely different environment.

> I remember when I went to college in Boston, I saw my first slum and cried. I met my first Jewish person and didn't even know what Yom Kippur was. I didn't even know how to take a subway or what a Jordan Marsh's basement was.

Third, a reverse trend is taking place -- the migration of urban families to rural areas.

> We were considered "hicks" by the newcomers who thought living in the country was "out of it." Out town didn't even have a movie theatre -- and for most of the years that I lived there, we didn't even have a town or school swimming pool. But they (the newcomers) not only learned to swim in the local swimming holes in the river and join in whatever other activities and advantages we could offer, but they even enjoyed these new experiences. But we (the ones who lived there all our lives) never fully understood where they "were coming from." How could they find milking a cow or driving a tractor to be fun? Fun to us would be going to the movies, trips to the zoo and "real" concerts. These were things that were foreign to most of us and things we thought that every "city kid" did.

Fourth, rural children grow up to become elected representatives. As such, they make decisions affecting every phase of their community, their society -- not only locally but state and nationally too. They carry their culture with them wherever they go.

> In many rural communities like ours, getting the hay in was more important then voting for the president of the country. During the 1968 election, while I was in college in Boston, I wrote a paper on the candidates. Part of my resource came from interviewing people on the street. I never realized how verbal and different views could be about political parties, candidates and issues. I knew members of my family could be verbal about these things, but that generally from my early associations was the exception, not the rule.

Rural schools must take the initiative to provide materials and curriculum guidelines that reflect rural culture to help students appreciate their own experience. This is a necessity because school commercial materials tend to be highly oriented towards metropolitan life.

> I know about breeding cows. I've seen baby chicks hatch and a calf (a baby cow) born. I know how to chop wood. I know how to cook dandelion greens and how to get maple syrup from a maple tree. I remember an urban friend visiting us one summer on the farm pointed to one of the cows and asked 'What's his name'? We, of course, explained that cows were <u>shes</u> and that bulls were <u>hes</u> and how to tell the difference.

> Our visitor was fascinated, yet we were telling him something that we didn't even realize that was common knowledge. All of the above things I learned from my farm upbringing and always treated as common knowledge. I didn't realize my head held a wealth of knowledge that could be interesting to someone else. We always studied urban life and were taught to envy the way urbanites lived.

The school can provide rural children the chance to recognize and develop their rural environmental resources. In rural areas the school often serves as the community center. More often than not, it is the only meeting place for students to get together with their friends. Many of the students are bussed in from great distances. This is the only time and place they are not with their family and are involved with a larger group. Rural schools tend to reflect the environment around them. They are the core for social activities and individual growth -- both important facets for becoming an individual and fitting in an integral part of society. As much as the rural school can provide, it can subconsciously deprive rural children of multicultural education through omission of topics, concepts, and cultural differences of those not living in the community. One example is when a child makes a racial slur and the teacher ignores it and lets it stand. Race Hatred 101 may just have been taught -- and even more damaging is the loss of an opportunity to provide the rural child with a chance to raise his awareness of cultural diversity and discuss his feelings.

> I don't ever remember any teaching of other cultures, except for the stereotype "book" culture. American

> Indians lived in the desert out West with the cowboys and they didn't fight anymore. I didn't even know New York State had any Indian reservations until I lived in Syracuse and visited the Ononadaga Indian Reservation. I fully expected, in spite of my years, to find teepees pitched and a smouldering fire. I was even more alarmed of what I did see, though. We studied Booker T. Washington and the Civil War -- Abraham Lincoln saved the blacks (except we weren't allowed to call them "blacks") from slavery and everything was better now. In church we learned that Jews did something in the First Testament and aside from giving birth to Jesus they didn't do much else. We learned in school that Hitler sent many Jews to death and everyone was supposed to read the Diary of Anne Frank. And what was a Susan B. Anthony anyways and a suffragette was just a long word we used in spelling class.

Rural teachers have advantages that no large, urban school can offer -- small classes, individual attention and personal student-teacher relationships. In rural communities, the teacher doesn't "get lost" in the crowd or "disappear" at the end of the day. She lives in the community. Here, teachers are not merely vehicles to cram facts into students, but have the unique position of knowing their students as individuals -- and vice versa. A rural teacher through his own participation, involvement, and observation, can motivate multicultural awareness and enhance environmental heritage.

Rural teachers should be encouraged to incorporate in their relationship

with children an understanding of the lives led by these children. It is recommended that these teachers make home visitations, especially in the summer months preceeding a new school year, to meet the children on their own ground, gain insight into the child's interests, meet parents as equals (versus the they-we concept), gain parents support and ideas, bring cumulative folders up-to-date, etc. Children, teachers and parents should begin the school year together.

Rural teachers should, for example, ride the school buses at various routes. Not only will they become familiar with the school district, they will become more aware of conditions of the area the child lives in and the difficulties that may exist in getting the child to and from school and/or participating in extracurricular activities.

> I remember my history teacher in high school -- he was a "city guy." He refused to believe one could drink raw milk straight from the cow and not get deathly ill and/or die. He did one day venture off into the "boondocks" to visit one student's family's farm. He was amazed at how poor the roads were and how far some students had to travel to get to school. He met the family, tried to milk a cow and even drank raw milk -- rich and still warm, smelling of barn aromas. He lived -- in fact, he didn't even get violently ill from the raw milk. For weeks he talked of this adventure as if he were born a farm boy.

Teachers should survey their classes and get feedback about their interests and chores. Curriculums could be developed on these topics or they could be incorporated into other topics. This application of rural experiences to academic subjects, gives students the best of both worlds. Math may have more relevance if taught in conjunction with percentages, proportions, temperatures, of making maple syrup. Reading about how a milking machine works in this area, might be more encouraging than insisting a child read about the cotton gin. The biological study of how tadpoles turn into frogs, how baby chicks hatch, and how calves are born has a more practical relevance than the reproduction of the amoeba. Writing stories about farm experiences and chores, not only encourages writing skills, but strengthens one's self-esteem, cultural values, and provides a growth experience for the teacher.

The child, who can tell the teacher how haying is done, is not only going to improve his self-esteem and confidence of worth, but by sharing he can give the teacher a great deal of insight as to what his life style is like. The rapport created by this exchange of thoughts and knowledges will make the teaching of multiplication or grammar easier as the student will be learning from his new "friend."

> I think appreciation of my rural background is important
> not only to me, but to the others I can share it with.
> In Boston, I learned about operas, subways and how to
> properly eat a lobster. I learned ballet was more than
> just standing on one's toes; cold potato soup tastes
> better when its called vichyssoise; token-besides
> being small gifts of appreciation, can get you a ride
> on the subway, mousse tastes better than moose probably

would; and that the Jewish New Year isn't January 1st and neither is the Chinese New Year. But how are my urban peers going to learn about rural life -- how are they going to learn to drive a tractor, milk a cow and even turn some of that milk into butter and cottage cheese? Will they get the chance to chase a pig? I have to share these experiences with my urban peers, because it will not be as easy for them to experience these things as it is to buy a ticket from Tick-a-tron to experience some urban treasurers. In turn, these urban peers could give me an appreciation of who I am and where I came from. They could make my environment and my culture seem worthwhile and full of undiscovered treasures. Learning how Brussels sprouts grow, canning tomatoes, milking a cow by hand and knowing if a cow is freshening were commonplace chores to my family; but now I have realized these countless knowledges are interesting parts of my life that should be appreciated and shared.

Training for rural education can begin before the teacher reaches the classroom. Students training in the education field should be given the opportunity, while still in college, to gain knowledge of rural life.

Such a program, would be a semester long experience, including three weeks of orientation on and off campus, eight weeks of off-campus rural experiences and four weeks of on-campus follow up and study.

The orientation sessions are designed to provide students with background information on rural education, rural life and what is expected of the student in the ensuing eight weeks of off-campus rural experiences. Topics covered in these sessions may include (but are not limited to): advantages of rural schools, students' cultural background, and specialized programs in rural areas. (Drier, 1978, p. 7).

In addition, on-campus study is based on the individuals needs and interest of participating college students. These needs and interests are met by the students arranging in cooperation with the project supervisor, independent studies in one or two liberal arts courses.

The off-campus experience includes:

1. Each student will live with two rural families in the same school district for four weeks each. It is expected that the student will be treated as a family member participating in family and farm chores.
2. Each student will participate in at least one community activity (i.e., 4-H, church choir, work with county extension agent).
3. Each student will interview various members of the community (i.e., politician, senior citizen, farmer, member of clergy, social service representative.)
4. Each student will have a classroom and non-classroom experience relative to the functions of the rural school. Time will be spent with teachers, principal, custodians, guidance counselors, etc. The classroom will make up at least 60% of this experience.

This program is offered to aid pre-service teachers and teachers with the needs of rural students for multiculture education. Before teachers can serve these students, they must be aware of the student's cultures. This program helps prospective teachers appreciate this diversity of the local community through personal contacts and experiences. Prospective teachers will also gain personal insight into the importance of cultural socialization which "shapes human perceptions -- the way one sees, feels, believes, and knows." (Teper, 1977, p. 20)

> The prospective teacher may be entering a world totally different from his ideas of rural people and their community. It is not a 9-5 job. It is not the same as the business person who leaves his/her family for the 9-5 job. Farming is a family business in which everyone takes part. It can start as early as 4 a.m. and ends when the work is done. During certain seasons, such as haying season, that means some days you work 'till the "sunlight goes out." Any time of the year the farmer can be up all night nursing a sick cow or helping a young calf enter the world.
>
> It is important that rural teachers understand this way of living. I can recall some of the times when one of my brothers would miss the school bus because of unexpected problems in doing chores or homework that might not have been completed because the milking equipment broke or the water line froze and he was so tired that he fell asleep doing his homework. Teachers with no

understanding of this rural life and its "emergencies" and the amount of time that it takes, may see this student as lazy or uncaring or aloof if he is late to class, doesn't have his homework done, or even falls asleep in class.

It just may not be the case. Scheduling your time and activities on the seasons and weather -- not the clock. Are you envious? It is not just back to nature living -- for many rural people it's work, it's survival. It can be hard and it can be tedious -- it is also my culture.

Shouldn't all children relish in their glory about their culture? Shouldn't they appreciate the importance of other cultures and these people they will share their lives with?

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